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ABSTRACT

Following a brief discussion of the concept of time as a resource and a clarification of that resource's importance, the author analyzes 20 ways administrators waste time and 40 ways administrators can save time. None of the techniques suggested require special forms or training. The time wasters considered fall into the areas of personal attitudes, personal and organizational planning, and working conditions. The time savers include ways to practice self-control, make decisions, eliminate distractions, organize activities, and delegate authority. Most importantly, the administrator must have a capable secretary. The author concludes that there are two ultimate "secrets" for saving time: to decide what is to be done with one's life personally and professionally, and to take charge of one's life personally and professionally. (PGD)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard G. Neal is a specialist in government personnel administration and public sector labor relations. During the past 15 years he has lectured to thousands of management personnel throughout the United States and Canada. He is the author of numerous books, as well as many articles in professional journals. The tactics described in this book are the result of research and experience and are used regularly by the author.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book concerns specific time wasters and specific time savers. By avoiding the time wasters, one automatically saves time. Or, to put it another way, the reverse of a time waster is a time saver. The twenty time wasters listed in this book are not abstract concepts. They are specific and real impediments to using time efficiently; and, by recognizing and avoiding these worst time wasters, the reader can improve materially his time management personally and professionally.

Following the twenty worst time wasters are the forty best time savers, all of which are practical and easy to use. No records, forms, or special training are needed to implement these tactics. And, since the forty best time savers are in addition to the twenty suggestions found in the list of time wasters, the book provides the reader with at least sixty of the most effective ways to use time efficiently.

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CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF TIME

How many times have you heard an employee or colleague complain: "I just don't have enough time"? How many times have you run out of time before completing a task as well as you would like? How many times has your job taken time away from your personal life?

A number of research projects have shown that most administrators do not manage time to the fullest efficiency. The average administrator is intelligent, reasonably healthy, and committed to his job. Given these basic characteristics, any administrator can improve his overall efficiency, while simultaneously finding more time for himself through better time management. This book is designed to provide practical suggestions that any administrator can put to work immediately. Beginning with the first day of using these suggestions, the typical manager should begin to see results. By the end of one month, the average administrator using these tactics to manage time should experience considerable improvement in his ability to handle his job. None of the suggestions require any special skill or effort. Most of them can be used simply by deciding to use them. Try them and see!

1. **How do you spend your time?**

There are 8,760 hours in a year.
We sleep about 2,920 hours each year.
We work on the job about 1,800 hours each year.
We spend about 300 hours in personal grooming each year.
We use about 540 hours per year for eating.
We spend about 500 hours each year on transportation.

That means out of 8,760 hours each year, only 2,700 are left "free." But how much of that time is actually "free" for most people? After sleeping, working, commuting, and grooming, many people still have obligations to care for the inside of their home, to fix up the outside of their home, to care for children, and to perform other chores which must be done. How much time do we really have each day, each week, each month, or each year to do what we want to do? And with that time, do we have the freedom and resources to do what we want to do?

Naturally, the hours presented above can vary substantially from person to person. They are meant only to be averages for the purpose of underscoring the fact that most people have limited "free" time.

2. **What is time?**

Time is a very complex and abstract phenomenon to define. At the end of this sentence, stop, without reading further and try to define what time is.

Time is the period between two events during which something exists, happens, or acts. During any period of time, man, the world, and the universe experience changes, but time itself cannot be changed. Only some of the events which take place within time can be changed. For example, although one can "save" time by eating while one works, one is still subjected to the inexorable passage of time. Time is a fixed thing. It cannot be lengthened; it cannot be shortened. Only the events under our control can be speeded up or slowed down.

Time is very important because it is one of only four basic elements for us to work with in our lives. Those four elements are space. Energy, materials, and time. Space gives us room within which to work. For example, in order to conduct our lives we must be able to move from one place to another, energy gives us the power to make things happen. For example, the sun, the original source of all our energy, gives us energy in the form of food and fuel. The materials of the earth give us the basic elements we need in order to live. For example, water, soil, and air are the basic materials upon which our lives are built. And then we have time, the fourth element of the cosmos.

Without time there could be nothing else. Time, then, is the ultimate element within which all existence takes place.

Although one can enhance one's life by increasing the use of space, energy, and materials, how effectively these three resources are used is greatly determined by how well one uses time. After all, we will all die, and frankly, we will all die soon, in relation to the infinite duration of the universe. In terms of the universe, our lives are but fleeting moments. Consequently, we must learn to use well what little time is left to us in our present form here on earth.

Which raises a very important question: How do you wish to spend the rest of your life? After all, there isn't much time left. Are you now living to die, or are you dying to live? Is this the beginning of the end of your life, or is this the beginning of the rest of your life? Is your life filled with problems, or is it filled with opportunities? You have only the time between now and when you die. How will you use this precious and finite resource?

In answering these important questions, most of us will find that making a living must still go on. Few of us will find total freedom to do as we wish. Most of us will conclude that continuing to work until retirement is necessary. For those people, this book offers a number of very

useful tactics for getting more done within a fixed period of time.

3. **Why do people "save" time?**

Most people intuitively recognize that time should not be "wasted." But what is "wasted" time? Wasted time is that period during which events take place which are not worthwhile--from our point of view. Waiting for a bus to go to work is viewed by many as wasted time. Watching an unenjoyable movie is a waste of time. A useless meeting is a waste of time. We all know when we have wasted time. We have wasted time when we are involved in something which does not contribute to what we want.

The opposite of wasting time is "saving" time. But time cannot be "saved." Time marches on and there is no force on earth which can stop its consistent and persistent passage. When we "save" time we are really only manipulating the events under our control so that these events use as little time as possible. Wouldn't it be great if time could be saved like money, and put into a bank to be used later when we want it? But time cannot be saved. Time steadily disappears and it cannot be retrieved. Time is the ultimate prison of life. Perhaps if we could achieve immortality we could have some relief from time. True,

immortality would give us more time for our lives, but even immortality would not stop the passage of time.

4. **Why do we "save" time?**
What is "saved" time?

As has been stated previously, time cannot be "saved"; so what is "saved" time? "Saved" time is time diverted from other tasks in order to do things we want to do or are required to do for which there would not otherwise be time. In other words, we use our time efficiently on Friday morning so we can leave the office on Friday afternoon to play golf. Or, we use our time efficiently on Friday morning so we can be ready for an important staff meeting on Friday afternoon. In the first case, the incentive was to obtain time to have fun. In the second case the incentive to save time was to be able to complete a required task on the job.

In order to save time there must be some purpose. The purpose can be to have extra time to relax. The purpose can be to have time for a part-time job. The purpose can be to have time to fulfill family responsibilities. Or, the purpose of saving time can be to accomplish more on the job in order to obtain a pay raise or a promotion. Without some purpose for saving time, little time will be saved. Therefore, an important prerequisite for saving time is the presence of goals in one's life. For

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those who set short-range and long-range goals, there is an automatic commitment to saving time, because such persons recognize that time is limited and their goals can be reached only if time is used wisely.

CHAPTER II

THE TWENTY WORST TIME WASTERS

Before we list the specific suggestions for saving time, let's look at the main causes of wasted time. Not every reader who reviews this list will be able to avoid or correct every time waster listed. But, when viewed as a whole, however, there's something in this list for every administrator. The chief time wasters are:

1. Time viewed as having little value

Have you ever known a person who seems to have all the time in the world? These are the people who will always stop and listen to anybody who wants to talk. These are the people who never seem to be going anywhere or to have anything in particular to do. Although there are some people who can allow time to pass in this manner, it's not a lifestyle suited to the busy administrator who has deadlines to meet and jobs to complete.

Therefore, the greatest time waster is a lack of appreciation for the importance of time as a resource. Such persons, as described above, seem to view time as endlessly available to the user. Such persons fail to recognize that time moves relentlessly and cannot be stopped or slowed. Such persons appear to be drifters on

the ocean of time, directed by the powers of the wind and currents of the sea. Such persons are seldom achievers and often let their entire lives pass by with little of value having been accomplished.

2. Poor health

How much efficiency do you lose in your life because of illness or just not feeling well? For many persons illnesses and lack of vitality are serious impediments to productive use of their time. Granted, not everyone can be in perfect health, but everybody can improve their health and vitality to some extent. Health problems caused by smoking can be corrected, if the smoker has the desire to do so. Health problems caused by intoxicants and addictive drugs can be corrected, if one has the will power. Obesity can be a source of poor health and lack of vitality; but obesity, too, can be corrected, if one decides that health and appearance are more important than the temporary pleasure associated with excessive eating.

Good natural food, light exercise, and adequate rest, coupled with proper mental attitude, are the prerequisites to good health, and none of these requirements require an excessive use of time. As a matter of fact, proper eating takes less time than excessive eating; and light exercise can be incorporated into one's daily activities without taking any extra time. As far as sleeping is concerned,

good food and light exercise make less sleep possible, especially if one learns how to relax during the day to conserve energy. In summary, most people have the wherewithal within themselves to improve significantly their health, with no extra investment of time or money. The end result is less loss of time for work and play.

3. Egotism

Many people have a need for attention. Often these people have a tendency to being self-centered and to considering only their selfish interests. Such persons are egotists. In other words they are not in control of their ego. Often such persons spend a portion of each day on the job exercising their own ego through a variety of convoluted behavior patterns. They talk just to hear themselves talk. They socialize too much in order to talk about themselves. They waste time and energy in unnecessary face-saving efforts. Their main motive on the job appears to prove how important they are, rather than to concentrate on getting a task done well.

Those who must have attention, and constantly prove their superiority and importance, have a daily task which more stable persons do not need to devote time to. The constant use of egotistical behavior consumes a lot of time, time which inevitably is taken away from other more important tasks. Therefore, one should check one's

motives regularly during contact with employees and colleagues to determine to what extent time is being spent in satisfying one's ego, rather than in completing a task promptly.

4. Lack of objectives and goals

Every adminsitrator should have long-range goals and short-range objectives. Every administrator should know exactly what he plans to achieve each day, each week, each month, and each year. As soon as these goals and objectives are set, one must then develop a strategy to achieve these goals and objectives. Inevitably, such a strategy must include a time line along which certain objectives must be met in order to arrive at the appointed goal by the deadline which has been established. For example, if an administrator is scheduled for a meeting from 1:30 P.M. until 5:00 P.M., he must organize his morning in order to complete the important tasks for that day by around 12:30 P.M., if he plans to have time for lunch. If an adminsitrator must have a comprehensive report ready by the end of the week, he must establish a plan which calls for the orderly completion of tasks which result in the report being finished by the end of the week. In other words, when deadlines are established for the achievement of goals, one must, of necessity, prepare to cause a series of events to take place within a specified

period of time. The more complex and the more numerous the goals, the more valuable does time become. For the person who has nowhere to go and no goals to achieve, time has little significance. But for the person who has jobs to complete and deadlines to meet, time becomes the most precious possession. Such a person soon learns by experience that time cannot be wasted.

5. Poor decisions from above

The main function of a manager is to organize and supervise the work of persons under his direction. Therefore, poor organization and supervision by a manager can cause wasted time by subordinates. Generally speaking, the higher the organizational rank of an administrator, the more important are his decisions. For example, a decision by a general to invade enemy territory is more important than a decision by a supply sergeant to delete fresh milk from the chow line. As a rule, the impact of an administrator's decision is correlated with the number of people in his department and the amount of budgetary funds he controls. Naturally, there are some exceptions to this rule, but the point is this: Regardless of an administrator's position on the organizational chart, his decisions affect the work of those under his control: therefore, poor decisions by this person often cause time to be wasted by subordinates.

Poor planning, supervision, and direction from above can affect the smallest office as well as the largest office. The supervisor who cannot dictate a letter correctly the first time, wastes time for himself and his secretary each time the letter is redone. The chief executive who calls an all-staff meeting just to make a routine announcement wastes a vast amount of expensive time. Therefore, all managerial decisions which require time from subordinates should be made with high regard for how much time such decisions will require to implement.

6. Poor equipment and supplies

The author has worked in a number of offices where it was impossible to obtain immediate typewriter repair, causing secretaries (and their bosses) to waste time unnecessarily. For most secretaries, the typewriter is an indispensable tool, and without it, work simply cannot be performed. An organization which cannot keep working typewriters available at all times for all secretaries is an organization in need of new managers.

All business operations need equipment and supplies, and when the equipment is broken and the supplies are missing, time is wasted. The broken copy machine, the inoperable word processor, the missing collator, and the downed computer can rob the organization of time vital to achieving its mission. The best rule is: any piece of

equipment worth purchasing is worth keeping in working order at all times.

7. **Inability to establish priorities**

Each act that an administrator performs creates a certain impact on the organization. For example, a decision to change the agency letterhead sets into motion a whole series of events, from the design of the new letterhead, to the printing of the new stationery, to the distribution of the new document; whereas, a decision to move a filing cabinet in an office likely would have limited impact on the work of the organization. The importance of a decision is determined by its relative impact on the mission of the agency and its relative demand on the resources of the agency. For example, a decision on the color of binders for regulations would have little impact on the mission or resources of the agency; but, a decision to rewrite the regulations of the agency could have an inestimable impact on the mission and resources of the organization. The problem with some administrators is, however, that they can't differentiate between the relative importance of decisions. Some administrators will spend more time arguing over the color of the binders than the decision to rewrite the regulations. It is this inability to set a priority on decisions which can result in untold amounts of wasted time.

8. Negative working environment

The author once worked in a bureaucracy where the leadership had become more concerned with political intrigue and personal vendettas than it was with carrying out the mission of the organization. The working environment in that particular situation was permeated with suspicion, fear, and disrespect. As a result, vast energy and endless hours were dissipatated in gossip, malingering, and self-protection. The management staff was so intimidated that no one would make a decision or take responsibility for any action. They became so divided that more time was invested in inter-office turf warfare than in legitimate management functions. As a result of such a negative environment, inestimable amounts of time were wasted. To avoid such a deplorable situation, every manager should establish a working environment that fosters security, trust, and respect, so that employees can devote their energies full-time to the business of the organization.

9. Unclear chain of command

Every organization needs to be structured so that its members understand the hierarchy for making decisions. Each employee should have only one boss and all recommendations should go to that person, and all directions to the employee should come from that same person. Failure to adhere to this simple fundamental rule

allows bypassing of superiors, fosters disloyalties, and diffuses accountability. As a result, there is a breakdown in the management integrity of the organization, and much more time is needed to get things done than is the case where a clear chain of command exists and is understood by all members of the agency.

10. Staff turnover

According to the concept discussed in the book Theory Z, employees are a capital investment of an organization, and, as such, they should not be lost to the organization. According to this view of employees, every reasonable effort should be made to retain employees and enhance their job performance. According to the author, Professor William G. Ouchi, high staff turnover would likely be a sign of poor management, because it would mean that the agency was losing a large portion of its investment as employees leave. Almost all employees perform jobs which required some degree of training and expertise. When these people leave the employer, they take with them all of the skills that were learned on the job. As a general rule, the replacement must relearn those same skills, which takes precious time away from the continuing needs of the organization.

Although much turnover among American workers can be attributed to factors other than job dissatisfaction, a

significant amount of employee turnover does take place because of job-related problems. Where such turnover is allowed to continue with no effort to reduce it, the employer is probably losing expensive time which otherwise could be saved. To minimize this loss of time, employers should analyze the reasons for employee resignations in order to take appropriate corrective actions. By reducing employee turnover, the employer can take an important step in avoiding another serious time waster.

11. Unscheduled meetings

How many times have you organized your day carefully, only to have it disorganized by your boss calling an unscheduled meeting? How many times have you called a meeting of your employees without any reasonable advance notice? Such unscheduled meetings not only disrupt the planned day for those who must attend, but also have a ripple effect. For example, Mr. Jones is required to attend an unscheduled meeting, but Mr. Jones had already scheduled a meeting of his staff which he must cancel, a meeting which may have been very difficult to arrange. Although emergency meetings are by their very nature unscheduled, and are therefore justified, in too many instances the unscheduled meeting is unscheduled simply because the administrator was poorly organized and viewed the time of his staff to be of limited value.

To minimize the loss of time due to unscheduled meetings, an administrator should call meetings only when that is the best method for accomplishing a given task. If meetings are a necessary part of the agency's operation, then they should be scheduled in such a manner that no unscheduled meetings become necessary. Unfortunately, however, some administrators violate this simple rule, because they seem to think that anything they want is automatically more important than the collective activities of the subordinates.

12. Excessive coffee breaks

Socialization and relaxation on the job are acceptable -- in moderation. Carried to excess, however, coffee breaks can create a number of developments which waste time on the job. Excessive coffee breaks are not only time wasters for the coffee drinker, but they set a bad example for other employees who may follow the lead set by others. Furthermore, some employees cannot afford to take coffee breaks because of their job demands; consequently, these persons may resent those who seem to be on a perpetual break. Although coffee breaks can provide an opportunity for employees to get to know one another, and thereby hopefully develop more productive working relationships, excessive coffee breaks can lead to social relationships back on the job which waste time. In order to minimize

the coffee break as a time waster, each administrator should monitor his own rest breaks and those of his subordinates.

13. Red tape

All of us have had to endure "red tape" at some time in our life, but exactly what is "red tape?" Although the term is used commonly and generally carries a negative connotation, "red tape" is difficult to define. As used by most people, however, red tape is the requirement to complete tasks which are not needed to accomplish the overall objective. Government agencies, in contrast to private companies, seem to create more red tape. There are many reasons for this phenomenon, all of which are rooted in differences between the nature of government and the nature of private enterprise. When a government agency requires that a two-page form be completed in order to request an extra trash pick up, that's likely to be red tape. This red tape usually results from imposing excessive ancillary demands or unrelated demands on a process to achieve an objective. For example, when a parent is required to complete a long, complicated form in order to apply for scholarship aid on the basis of need, the form will likely call for information that is not specifically needed to determine if the applicant qualifies. The form will likely seek information which will be used in an

accounting study for some government agency. And although the government agency may have a need for such information, from its point of view, the individual applicant will probably view irrelevant questions as examples of red tape and a waste of time.

There are many reasons for red tape. Quite often the reason is based upon the fact that a few people in any organization cannot be trusted. As a result, all employees must complete forms and engage in activities designed to minimize the risk of dishonest actions. But regardless of the reason for it and wherever it exists, red tape should be viewed critically, because it is a potential source of wasted time.

14. Rivalries

Although some competition between employees and between departments within an agency is healthy, excessive competition can develop into harmful rivalries. Each manager, from the chief executive to the first-line supervisor, should develop a perception to detect latent human relations problems in his department which might grow into unhealthy rivalries. Where an administrator is responsible for more than one department, he should take steps to preclude competition which may be harmful to any department under his supervision. The chief executive can make a real contribution to inter-departmental relation-

ships by setting a tone of cooperation and by making it clear in various ways that rivalries between departments and individuals will not be tolerated. Government service is a human service. It is not a profit-making organization, and as such, all employees of the agency should view themselves as members of one team.

Where rivalries are allowed to exist, there is an inevitable waste of time. For example, the author was associated with an organization where the chief executive relished competition between staff members. He thought that such an environment would foster greater efficiency. What he didn't realize though, was that the competition which he fostered resulted in a lack of cooperation between the various departments, thus diminishing, not increasing, efficiency. So much time was spent on advancing departmental goals, that little time was left for overall agency goals.

15. Responsibility without authority.

In contrast to private industry, the decision-making process in government is more diffused. Part of the cause for this diffusion can be traced to the absence of authority where responsibility is assigned. As a general rule, any employee given responsibility for a task, must be given the authority to accomplish the task. Failure of responsibility

and authority to go hand in hand can result in a significant impediment to overall agency efficiency.

For example, the common practice in public school districts is to hold the building principal responsible for the cleanliness of the school building. But in a number of school districts, the individual building principal has limited authority over the custodians and limited power to obtain cleaning supplies and equipment. In such a situation, how can the building principal be held accountable for building cleanliness? If the principal is held accountable for keeping the school clean, he must have direct supervisory authority over the custodians, and he must have a reasonable budget to purchase supplies and equipment.

Failure to assign authority with responsibility results in duplication, performance voids, buck-passing, and other practices which waste valuable time. Therefore, each administrator should review carefully the job descriptions of employees assigned to him to assure that each employee has the authority to accomplish the tasks assigned to him.

16. Action without proper thought

Many decisions of government are very complex matters, whether they are policy decisions of the governing body or administrative decisions of the executive staff. Decisions generally result in something happening or some-

thing ceasing to happen. In either case, decisions have an impact on the operation of the agency. The more important the decision, the greater the impact on the organization. But whether decisions are minor or major, they should be prepared for as carefully as time and resources permit. Although the ability to make decisions quickly is generally a quality admired in executives, quick decisions can be worse than worthless, if they are the wrong decisions.

All administrators have experienced occasions when they have made wrong decisions because they were made in haste. Through this experience, most veteran administrators recognize that no decision is simple. Although speed may be a virtue in making emergency decisions, the successful administrator is measured by the degree to which he carefully analyzes all considerations related to an issue before making a decision. Making a decision absent such careful consideration results in spending time pursuing the wrong objectives.

17. Failure to identify the problem

The process of running a government agency is largely a process of solving a continuous stream of problems. The first step in solving any problem is to identify the problem. Failure to identify the problem at the outset wastes time

planning a solution to the problem; plus, it wastes time in the actual solution of the problem.

Identification of a problem can sometimes take more time than constructing a solution to the problem. This phenomenon is particularly true in government service where there are political undertones to many administrative decisions. For example, a school board may find that statistics indicate that while the cost of education ascends, the educational achievement of students descends. Given this hypothetical situation, the school board may think that it has discovered the "problem." But they have not discovered the problem; they have only discovered some facts which may not even be verified. Suppose, however, that this mythical school board decided wrongly that the "problem" was that children were not taught to read by phonics because of political pressure by a group of parents. And suppose, as a result of this pressure, the school board embarked upon a long-range reading program which five years later produced no appreciable change in the original statistics. Wouldn't this be a tragic waste of time? Unfortunately, this hypothetical example is too often indicative of reality in the public sector, where political considerations are often more important than solving the substantive problem.

18. Muddling by policy makers

There are several fundamental differences between private enterprise and government service which account for the better use of time in the private sector. Whereas the private sector involves private economic transactions, the public sector involves public political transactions. As a result, private enterprise is more able to devote its time specifically to its objectives. On the other hand, the nature of government is such that it must wade through a swamp of political considerations in order to achieve its objectives.

In the private sector, private companies are generally run by the managers, not by boards of directors. But in the public sector boards of directors, e.g., school boards, city councils, etc., do play an active role in managing government services. And the nature of government is such that members of these boards are likely to be amateurs in management affairs. Furthermore, these board members are just as likely to be highly motivated by political considerations.

When members of governing bodies with limited managerial skill and considerable political motivation step out of their legitimate policy-making role and attempt to administer an agency, serious problems can be anticipated. The author has been involved in a number of situations where the governing body seemed to see no distinction between the adoption of policy and the administration of

policy. When policy makers attempt to administer an organization, the ultimate result is decreased efficiency, which means that significant time is being wasted. In order to minimize the possibility that such a state of affairs will develop, the chief executive and the governing body should attempt to achieve a modus operandi regarding their respective roles, based upon the best interest of the government service involved.

19. **Lost and inaccessible information**

How much time does your secretary spend each day searching for needed information in the files? How often have you faced an emergency when existing information was needed, but it couldn't be located? How often has your organization needed information that existed, but simply was not accessible? Wherever there is a poorly organized information storage system or information retrieval system, there is bound to be a significant amount of time wasted. Decisions are based upon information, and not all information can be stored in the minds of employees. Data, reports, correspondence, charts, documents, etc., all contain information which is needed by an organization in order to make decisions. If this information is inaccessible, the decision needed may be incorrect; and if the information is accessible, but not easily obtained, then time is wasted.

Information management is a subject appropriate for an entire book; therefore, the subject cannot be discussed in detail here. Suffice it to say that there are hundreds of governmental units which don't even have a complete set of codified policies and regulations, let alone an organized method for filing and storing information. Such organizations seem to be in a perpetual tizzy in trying to make decisions. As a result every employee in those organizations is forced to participate in a mammoth time wasting process. The solution? Codify the agency's policies and regulations and establish a modern system for information storage and retrieval.

20. Failure to organize

One of the worst wasters of time is the inability or failure to organize one's tasks. The failure to organize one's work can be due to a number of causes. The inability to differentiate between the importance of various tasks can result in more time being spent on the unimportant than the important. The failure to use delegation properly can result in the department head being inundated with work, while subordinates sit idly by. The inability to see a large job as a sequence of individual small tasks can make routine jobs difficult and protract their accomplishment. And, as has been mentioned previously, the absence of

goals and objectives can cause an administrator to flounder on the job.

Whatever the cause, inability to organize is a problem so serious, that if uncorrected, it will not only waste time for the administrator himself, but will spread inevitably to those around him. In some cases, the root cause of lack of organization can be so complex that a remedy is impossible. In such cases, the offender should be placed in another position more suitable to his abilities.

CHAPTER III

THE FORTY BEST TIME SAVERS

As discussed previously, although time cannot be "saved," the events which take place within time can be manipulated so that they take less time than otherwise would be the case. This chapter contains 40 of the best time savers that an administrator can use. Each one is practical and immediately useable, requiring no special training or unreasonable effort. By incorporating these tactics into one's professional and personal life, there should be an immediate increase in the amount of "free" time.

1. Double time and triple time

One way to increase achievement during a fixed period of time is to perform two or three activites at once. For example, many meetings require so little attention that the attendee can work on paper tasks while the meeting is in progress. For people who can deal with only one thought at a time, doubling up on time may be of limited value. But most competent administrators have learned to give attention to two trains of thought at one time. For example, many persons can read a memorandum while

listening to someone discuss a related topic. Such a skill is an important asset in saving time.

The author has found that eating lunch in his office provides a great deal of time which otherwise would be spent in transportation, waiting, and socializing. By eating lunch in the office, one can "find" about 200 hours per year to be used as one sees fit. Just think -- 200 hours is five work weeks! As an example of how valuable this time can be, the author wrote an entire book within one year by using only his lunch period. In addition to saving time by eating in one's office, there is the bonus of saving money and controlling one's diet. By carrying one's lunch, the quality of the food can be better controlled. For a number of reasons, however, eating lunch in the office may not be suitable for everyone, but for many persons such a tactic can produce vast amounts of time which can be used for activities at the discretion of the individual.

The opportunities for doubling up on time are almost limitless. Some people exercise while watching television. Others complete routine paperwork while talking on the phone. And in some cases time can be put to triple use as the author often does by eating breakfast and by listening to educational tapes while commuting to work.

2. **Impose deadlines**

According to Parkinson's law, work expands to fill the time available. To avoid this common phenomenon, an effective administrator sets deadlines for himself and his subordinates. By establishing a specific point in time by which a task must be completed, one is forced to place a value on time and to apportion it to the task carefully. The absence of deadlines will not only waste time, but also cause missions to fail.

The process of setting deadlines can range from the simple to the complex. Telling a secretary that a letter must be typed by 3:00 P.M. is quite easy since there is only one simple deadline involved. However, setting deadlines for the completion of the agency budget may be extremely complex and involve many deadlines. In establishing deadlines for difficult and complex jobs, the final deadline for the completion of the entire task must be determined first. All other deadlines for the subparts of the job must then be subservient to that ultimate deadline.

For example, suppose an agency must prepare a report for distribution to all employees. The first step is to set a specific deadline by which time all employees should have the report in their hands. From that date other deadlines are established to assure that the final deadline is met. A date must be set for the report to be printed. A deadline must be set for when the report should be copy-ready for

the printer. A date must be set for when the final draft is ready. A deadline must be set for the first draft of the report, and so on. With such carefully orchestrated deadlines, much time will be saved. Without such deadlines, the report will likely never materialize.

3. Delete some activities

Since time is fixed and cannot be lengthened, how we use our time is a matter of priorities. For example, do we watch television or go for a walk? The choice is a matter of priorities. Some activities are simply a waste of time in comparison to all of the good things we could spend our time on. Therefore, some time consuming activities in our lives should be simply eliminated. For example, a number of studies indicate that on the average, Americans spend about 35 hours each week watching television. For people who want full lives, 35 hours of watching television each week is not wise. Many people spend exhorbitant amounts of time on excessive personal grooming. For example, some women (even some men) spend several hundred hours each year just taking care of their hair. For men with long hair this amount of time can be reduced by keeping hair short. For women, however, it may not be that easy, since society has different expectations for women. Suffice it to say that an awful lot of time (and money) is spent needlessly by an awful lot of people just dressing their hair.

4. Use creative periods

Many people claim they have special times when they are energetic and creative. Some people are early-morning people, while some are night owls. If there is a special time during the day when one feels more energetic and creative, then that period should be taken advantage of. The author has found that his most productive period for writing is very early in the morning, from about 4:00 A.M. to 9:00 A.M., especially in motel rooms.

If an administrator has an assignment which requires a high degree of concentration and creativity, he should try to reserve his creative time during the day for this activity. If the creative period is late at night, then the time spent late at night can be deducted from the normal daytime hours, if necessary and permissible. By using those creative moments, more can be achieved in a fixed period of time than otherwise would be the case. In some cases and for some people, one hour of concentrated work during a creative period late at night can be worth three hours of work in the office during the afternoon.

5. Control those worries

Fear and worry are strong emotional motivators in our lives, causing us to take necessary actions to protect ourselves. However, constant fear and worry about everything can be a serious handicap. If we worry constantly

about all of the potential dangers in life, not only do we waste much time, but we paralyze our ability to make decisions. The excessively fearful person seeks ways to minimize all risks, thus allowing time and opportunity to pass for fear of making a wrong decision. On the other hand, a confident person, one who seldom experiences fear, will seek out new experiences and better opportunities. This type of person seldom wastes time.

The constant presence of worry is an energy-draining burden and a time-wasting distraction. We will all die someday, and we will all lose loved ones. Those are immutable facts. Now, we can waste time worrying about those inevitabilities, or we can set these facts aside and get on with the business of living a full life. There is no simple formula for controlling fear and worry, but this rule should help: Either take action to remove or minimize the source of fear or forget it. Or put more poignantly in the familiar exhortation: "Give me the strength to change the things which I can change, the serenity to live with that which I cannot change, and the wisdom to tell the difference."

6. **The tickler file**

Every administrator must meet deadlines for himself and assure that subordinates meet their deadlines. As discussed previously, if deadlines are not set and adhered

to, much time can be forever lost. But how can an administrator keep up with all of the various deadlines which a group of subordinates must meet? Simple. Set up a tickler file. A tickler file has thirty-one (31) folders in it -- one for each day of the month. Every time a deadline of a certain date, e.g., the 21st of the month is given to a subordinate, a copy of the directive is placed in the tickler file folder marked the "21st." This one simple tactic can be used by any administrator, and it is guaranteed to get jobs done better, while saving significant amounts of time.

7. Screen telephone calls

Some administrators will accept a telephone call from anybody at anytime. Such a practice is a waste of valuable time. Many telephone calls consume time unnecessarily and interrupt vital work. Just because a caller wants to talk to you does not give that person an automatic right to interrupt your work at the caller's convenience.

There are several ways to avoid wasting time on unnecessary telephone interruptions. For example, a competent secretary can handle many inquiries without help from the supervisor. There are many tactful ways that a secretary can inquire into the nature of the caller's business. Or, some calls can be appropriately referred to a subordinate. If neither of these tactics work, the secretary can ascertain what the caller wants and then return the

call later. Some administrators protect their time by accepting calls only at a specified time during the day, except for emergencies.

The telephone is an indispensable tool on the job and in our personal lives, but it must be used properly, as any special tool should be. By limiting telephone conversations to those which specifically require the personal involvement of the administrator, hours of valuable extra time can be produced to use for more important work.

8. Clear instructions

Much time is wasted on the job because many employees do not understand the directions given to them. Sometimes this occurs because the boss doesn't even understand what he wants done himself. But more often than not, the confusion stems from an inability to articulate a direction clearly. Whenever a subordinate is in doubt as to what is being requested, he should attempt to repeat the request to the supervisor. If the supervisor doubts that the subordinate understands a request, he should ask the employee to repeat the request; and, when necessary, describe how the request will be accomplished. Failure to reach a clear understanding at the outset of a task can increase the chance that time will be spent on needless tasks, while required tasks go undone.

9. Schedule appointments carefully

The author once worked for a chief executive who could not (would not?) conclude appointments on time. Beginning with the first appointment in the morning, he would begin to fall behind on his appointment schedule. By lunch time, two or three people would be waiting in anger while one or two others had left in frustration. Not only was he taking too much of his own time in conferences, but he was wasting the valuable time of others who were forced to wait. Just imagine the impact that such poor control had on the overall time management of that particular agency. Not only was time wasted, but poor human relations were created.

In the case cited above, better scheduling could have helped relieve the problem. If a chief executive wants to waste unnecessary time in appointments, that's his business, but he shouldn't impose the consequences of his own inefficiencies on others. In situations where a chief executive allows reasonable criticism from his staff, the problem described here should be called to the attention of the offender. Where the boss prohibits such constructive advice, the organization may have no choice but to endure.

10. Delegate

Some administrators seem so impressed with their own ability and so suspicious of the abilities of others, that they

cannot let go of any job. Although some subordinates need more direction and supervision than others, most subordinates are capable of doing an acceptable job without interference from the boss. Therefore, the basic rule in delegation is: Delegate - the entire job!

In order to delegate an entire job to a subordinate, it may be necessary to transfer some authority so that the responsibility assigned to the subordinate is accompanied by the necessary clout to get the job done. Where needed, authority cannot be transferred to a subordinate, it may be necessary in those situations for the supervisor to intercede at appropriate times to assure that certain required acts take place.

For example, suppose that a supervisor wants his secretary to arrange all appointments for him. If this is actually what the boss wants, then he should allow the secretary to arrange all appointments without interference. In making this assignment to the secretary at the outset, however, the supervisor should give guidelines within which to operate. The supervisor should also make it clear to the secretary that she is being given the authority to make decisions as to when and how long appointments should be. At that point, the supervisor should forget about making appointments and go on to other challenges.

11. **Break it down**

Some projects on the job are very large in scope and very complex in nature, sometimes appearing to be impossible tasks when first viewed. As has been discussed elsewhere in this book, the failure to plan carefully how a task will be accomplished cannot only waste valuable time; but worse, poor planning can actually result in failure to perform the task. Some jobs seem so overpowering when viewed in toto that it's difficult to even know where to begin. In such cases, planning is even more imperative to avoid wasted time.

One way to conquer a difficult task is to break it down into its various parts. Always the individual components of a task are simpler than the whole of the components. Once the task is broken down to its simpler parts, the administrator has taken the first constructive step in accomplishing the assignment in avoiding wasted time.

12. **The to-do list**

In the chapter on time wasters, the importance of goals and objectives was discussed. But goals and objectives cannot be achieved unless the administrator has a plan for each day. In other words, within reason, the administrator should have a list of specific activities to be completed each day. As a general rule, the list should contain a few more items than would usually be considered

a normal load. By doing this, one is forced to budget time and use other techniques of efficiency in order to complete all items on the list.

Necessity is the mother of invention, and a list of to-do items with more items than the average administrator would normally handle is the best way to prove this aphorism. By using this tactic daily, the administrator will discover many imaginative ways to save time, in addition to those discussed in this book.

13. Handle paper only once

Following is a brief description of how to waste time dealing with routine work. An administrator receives a memorandum. He reads it, but can't make a decision as to what action should follow. He puts it on a stack of other materials similarly dealt with. The next day he reads his stack of papers again. This time he makes a decision on a few of them, but most he returns to the stack. In the meantime, additional memoranda arrive and he reads them and places them on the stack. Day by day the stack grows. As a result, valuable time is wasted and decisions are left unmade, which in turn wastes time for others.

With only an occasional exception, the author puts all communications to him in one of three separate categories on his desk. Category one is for those items which can or should be decided upon immediately, or as soon as possible.

The second category is for communications which should or do require action, but only within two to four weeks. The third category consists of reading material which would be advisable to read, but is not actually required reading. Materials are placed in their proper category after a quick initial scanning. After that, the paper is handled only once, which means that a decision of some kind is made on each item. The purpose of the procedure described here is to keep the paper moving off the administrator's desk in an expeditious manner.

Most administrators must know how to handle paper traffic in order to survive, and the method described above will work for most people. This system shows at a glance how far behind the administrator is at any given time and provides a clear picture of what is pending. It moves paper off the desk daily and holds items which need further examination. Regardless of the actual method used, however, to handle paper work, the univesal rule is: handle it only once.

14. Have a plan for all meetings

Many administrators are responsible for conducting numerous meetings. The potential for saving time or wasting time in these meetings is compounded in direct relation to the number of persons involved. Keep in mind that five minutes wasted in a meeting of twelve people is

an entire man-hour lost. How many supervisors would allow an employee to sit for one hour doing nothing?

Making an assumption that all administrators are capable of conducting a meeting, here are some simple rules to avoid wasting time:

a. Distribute a printed agenda with the times noted for each item of business.
b. Identify to the group what the objective is for each item. In some cases the objective will be to provide information, while in other cases the objective may be to arrive at a group decission.
c. Do not run overtime. If necessary, reschedule the meeting.
d. Keep all discusion relevant to the topic under consideration.
e. Require punctuality of all members.
f. Have all needed materials present and ready for use.
g. Try to finish early. This will provide you with "found" time, which can be applied to other activities.

In some cases, a meeting can be expedited by scheduling it before lunch or an hour before quitting time. Such deadlines will impose pressure on each participant to conserve time without any direction from the chairperson.

15. Use ad hoc committees

Some jobs are too big for one person, too small for an entire committee, or they cut across departmental lines. In such cases, the administrator should consider the possibility of using an ad hoc committee. Such a committee is one designed for a single purpose for a single time. An ad hoc committee is usually composed of persons best suited to accomplish the objective of the special assignment; and, by matching employees with a specific task, time is used efficiently.

By way of example, let's assume that an agency head has decided that the agency should attempt to organize a recreational program for employees and gives the assignment to the personnel director. Given this hypothetical case, the personnel director would be well-advised to organize an ad hoc committee to draw up recommendations. The committee should be composed of representatives from the various departments of the agency. The personnel director, in keeping with advice discussed earlier in this book should give the committee clear directions and set a deadlines by which time a report should be completed.

16. Establish some private time

Have you ever gone to your office on a Saturday, Sunday, or holiday and discovered how much "work" you

could accomplish without any distractions from telephone calls, drop-ins, and appointments? If you have not had this experience, try it sometime. You'll find that you can accomplish two days of work in one, at least. For years the author edited several newsletters by working only one morning each weekend. This produced at least eight hours of "found" time during the week for other jobs, or time off for recreation or personal obligations.

Some administrators have found that they can set aside some time early in the morning before official office hours for their private time. Others stay late after work. Some administrators simply reserve time on a regular basis during which they will not be disturbed except for emergencies. Whatever method is used to acquire it, however, private time can be a valuable tactic in saving time. By setting aside time to do those tasks which require privacy and concentration, the administrator minimizes the stop-and-go nature of the office routine which is very disruptive and time wasting for tasks requiring protracted concentration.

17. Keep an organized office

The author once worked for a chief executive who allowed nothing of an obvious nature to be in his office except those items which were of required utilitarian use. He had a desk, a chair, a telephone, and a small conference

table with four chairs. That was all. No decorations, no desk paraphernalia, no filing cabinet. That office reflected the man's approach to his job which was that all paper work should be managed by an aide.

Not all administrators have an administrative aide, but almost all administrators have a secretary. And, with proper guidance and delegation, a good secretary can help an administrator organize his office so that it is a time saver, rather than a time waster. Although there are some administrators who seem able to locate needed items despite excessive clutter, on the average, an orderly office indicates an orderly administrator.

An orderly office is likely to be one where much of the paper work has been delegated to the secretary. As far as time-saving is concerned, this method is quite advantageous to the administrator, in that he uses no time to locate anything. When material is needed, he simply asks the secretary to retrieve it while he continues to work on more productive enterprises. True, the secretary must take time to locate an item, but she is likely paid less than the administrator.

18. **Write brief letters**

Some administrators waste time by writing long letters and memoranda, when just a brief note or telephone call would be sufficient. Unfortuantely, some corres-

pondence, which would otherwise be unnecessary, is caused by a working environment of excessive fear, where the administrator feels the need to create a "paper trail" to protect himself from blame should something go wrong. This "CYA" syndrome is indicative of an employment atmosphere, which in itself, is a terrible time waster, but this problem is discussed elsewhere in this book.

The point being stressed here is that written communications can be time savers or time wasters, depending upon how they are handled. If a formal memorandum or letter is necessary, then it should be as short as possible. In many cases, however, a response to a letter or memorandum can be hand written on the original correspondence. Although some purists may find this objectionable, the technique does save time. Where the administrator himself is originating a written communication, a simple hand-written note may be sufficient in many cases. The author handles most written communications by using a typewriter to send brief notes, where a formal communication is not necessary. The use of the typewriter is not only quicker than hand written messages, it has the added advantage of saving time for the recipient, who is spared the pain of translating indecipherable handwriting.

19. Eat light meals

As discussed elsewhere, eating at restaurants can consume time unnecessarily, and eating heavy meals, rather than light meals, adds to the actual amount of time needed for eating. Heavy meals are a time waster in an indirect way, too. For example, a heavy meal at lunch, particularly if accompanied by a couple of alcoholic beverages, often creates a lethargic after-effect, slowing down one's normal rate of performance. Additionally, heavy meals consumed over an extended period of time will likely add unnecessary weight. And, overweight people are generally less healthy than those who keep their weight within an acceptable range. By being heavier than advisable, one is likely to fail to achieve an optimum health level due to overeating; one is guilty of willfully impairing one's performance potential. To the extent that performance potential is impaired, then to that same extent, there is a waste of time. In summary, then, eat light and save time.

20. Avoid sit-down conferences

There are times when a sit-down conference in the administrator's office is the best way to transact business, but the sit-down conference is often overused. Whenever a sit-down conference is held, when a briefer method could be used to accomplish the same objective, time is wasted.

There are any number of ways to communicate with people to avoid a formal face-to-face conference. In some cases, a simple note is all that is needed, or a telephone call. Where more than two people need to be involved, a conference telephone call can be arranged. Or, where an administrator has a speaker telephone, other persons in his office can be involved in a conference, even though there is only one telephone.

The author tries to keep persons out of his office except when there is no better way to transact business. Several tactics can be employed to deter unnecessary office visits. The intruder can be met in the doorway and not permitted entry. This approach usually forces the visitor to get to the point. Or, if a conference must take place, beat the other fellow to the draw. Visit his office! By doing this, you are in more control and can terminate the conference more easily than if the conference took place in your office.

Often an administrator is accosted in a hallway. In such an event, remain in the hallway. Don't invite the accoster into your office. Or, tell the person to walk with you to your destination and conduct a conference while you're walking. That will test just how serious the visitor really is. In other cases, where two people are going to the same destination in an automobile, a conference can be held in transit.

21. Carry a note pad

How many good ideas are never used because they are forgotten? How many times have you forgotten to do something that you should have done? The best way to keep good ideas and avoid forgetting obligations is to have available at all times something to keep notes on. For many, this could be a simple and inexpensive 3" x 5" note pad. Whether a note pad, clip board, or notebook is used, an adminstrator should have some means at all times to record thoughts which need to be retrieved later. By writing down such matters, one is freed from the burden of trying to remember ideas and obligations and freed of the worry of forgetting.

At the time of the writing of this book, the author had on his desk a stack of some 500 3 x 5 file cards which contained the basic contents for another book. All of the information on these cards was recorded while the author was either driving his automobile, attending a meeting, conducting a conference, watching television, or engaging in some similar activity. Had these thoughts not been recorded immediately, they would have been lost forever.

Administrators who refuse to record obligations and ideas are bound to forget. Each time this happens, time is wasted because a deadline is missed or a good idea goes unused. Not only that, but administrators who refuse to

carry a note needlessly clutter their minds with concerns which could just as easily be carried on paper.

22. Unanticipated time

The average person faces several times during the day when he has nothing specific which he is required to do. Faced with such "free" time, many people will pick up some inane reading material or turn to the television set for distraction. Or if on the job, a person may either stretch out a current task or engage in some low priority activity, such as organizing the contents of the desk or purging the files. These are wasteful ways to use unanticipated time.

The best way to be prepared to use unplanned free time is to have extra projects pending at all times. You will recall that earlier in this book, the value of goals and objectives was stressed. By having goals and objectives in life on the job, one seldom has a problem with deciding what to do with some unanticipated free time. Such a person immediately applies the found time to his goals and objectives.

Let's say that an administrator has chosen as an objective the reading of three specific books by a certain date. By having one of these books with him at all times, he has a ready-made activity for those surprise moments when he has "nothing to do." The rule, then, for using

unanticipated free time is: Always have access to some extra project which can be worked on in spare moments.

23. Skip meetings

Is there an administrator alive who has not attended some meetings which were a waste of time? Have you ever attended a meeting where the information presented could have been communicated by memorandum? The answer to both of these questions is a likely "yes." Useless meetings are very expensive to the employer and to the employee. If an employee spends only one afternoon each week in a useless meeting, the employee has lost 10% of his work week. Would you be willing to have someone take away 10% of your work week and still hold you responsible for a full week of work? As far as the employer is concerned, one meeting for one afternoon for fifty people, each being paid $150 per day, costs the employer $2,850. And, that does not include travel reimbursement, where travel is required to attend the meeting, or the expenses for preparing the room for the meeting and the clean up afterwards.

No administrator should hold a meeting if there is a better way to accomplish the objective. By the same token, no administrator should attend a worthless meeting if he can avoid it. But even good meetings need not be attended. The author regularly does not attend meetings

and conferences, if there is a more efficient way to obtain the information to be presented. The best way to avoid a meeting but still obtain the necessary information is to ask a colleague to brief you on what transpired. The briefing is usually better than the meeting itself and always takes much less time than the length of the meeting.

24. Screen mail

Some administrators receive so much mail that if they processed it all themselves, there would be little time left to accomplish the main job. Whether the mail is voluminous or slight, however, someone else, probably a secretary, should screen the mail. Naturally, there is no single rule which can be applied to all situations for the screening of mail; however, there are several ways that a secretary can save the boss time in dealing with his mail. The secretary can:

a. open the mail
b. sort the mail into categories
c. send some mail to the appropriate office
d. draft responses to some letters
e. attach needed backup information where needed

Every hour spent on these activities by a secretary is one hour saved by a higher paid administrator. One hour per day saved in this fashion is five hours per week, which is over 10% of the work week!

25. Screen appointments

Appointments are often unnecessary, and as such, waste time. To avoid unnecessary appointments always seek a better way to handle the situation. In order to do this, however, the administrator (or secretary) must find out what is the exact reason for the appointment. When this information is known, an appointment may not be needed. Perhaps the matter can be handled by a brief discussion on the telephone. Or, perhaps the appoint is just to obtain information -- information which could be sent through the mail. Or, perhaps the caller really needs to see someone else. As far as appointments are concerned, the same rule applies here as the rule for meetings: Don't agree to an appointment unless there is no better way to handle the matter for which the appointment was intended.

26. Screen readings

Many administrators daily receive lettes, memoranda, reports, books, charts, newsletters, advertisements, notes, etc. Not all of these materials should be read by the administrator himself. In some cases, the secretary can divert the materials to a more appropriate office. In other cases, she can flag the more important documents. Whatever method is used, however, the administrator should read only those materials which contribute to accomplsihing his job. To prioritize his reading material,

the administrator may wish to use the three-category method discussed previously. Category one is for reading material which must be read immediately. Category two is for materials which need to be read within a few weeks. And the last category is reserved for materials which are not required reading but should be read at some point in time.

27. **Plan each day**

"I'm too busy to plan" is the common complaint of the administrator who seems always behind -- always a little disorganized. Such a complaint is ridiculous! The only reason that people don't have time to plan is because they don't make time to plan. And, without a daily plan of activities, accompanied by time allotments, time will be wasted each day; and worse, the administrator is likely to fail at his job. In other words, failing to plan is planning to fail!

28. **Make decision promptly**

Much time can be wasted due to slow decision making, especially where the failure to make a decision promptly affects the work of many people. A decision is an act which gives the go-ahead for action to take place. Until a decision is made, all subordinates are held in abeyance, biding their time on activities of lesser value, waiting for

the boss to make up his mind. To the extent that a decision is delayed unnecessarily, time is wasted to that same extent.

Fear and lack of information are the two major causes of indecision. Fear is usually caused by an employer who has demonstrated in many ways that mistakes, no matter how small, will bring about punishment. Fear is caused by the employer who takes good work for granted, but highlights mistakes of employees. As long as fear permeates the offices where important decisions are made, few worthwhile decisions will be made. Fear stultifies the decision-making process. If decisions are to be made to benefit the employer, there must be the freedom to make an occasional wrong decision. Babe Ruth was the home run king, but it has been alleged that he was also a strike-out king. In other words, he made a lot of bad decisions in order to achieve a lot of good results. Had he been punished for every strike, he likely would have made few home runs.

All decisions require the weighing of all relevant considerations; therefore, all information surrounding the decision should be available. Once the relevant information has been assembled, it should be arranged so that all options are known and can be compared. Some people are hesitant to make decisions until all relevant information is known and all risks have been reduced to an

absolute minimum. But all needed information is not always available when a decision needs to be made. In such a situation, the best rule is: SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING!

29. Resist upward delegation

Some subordinates are masters at dumping problems on their bosses. Female subordinates may attempt to appeal to the ego of the male supervisor by stating: "You're so strong and intelligent, I know you can do this better than I can." Or, a subordinate may come in with a problem stating: "I don't have the authority to settle this matter, so you do it." Or, the subordinate may say: "We could do this, or we could do that. What do you want to do, boss?" All of these types of approaches should be resisted. No subordinate should be allowed to dump a problem on the boss without just cause.

If the employee claims the problem is too tough, then tell him to do it anyway. If the employee says he does not have the authority to resolve a problem, give him the authority to do so. If the subordinate asks you what you want to do, ask him what he thinks should be done. In other words, force subordinates to make decisions, to make recommendations, and then hold them accountable for their actions. Do not allow upward delegation. If necessary, put a sign on your desk which reads: "Don't forget to take your problems with you."

30. **Seize the initiative**

The overriding value of long-range goals and short-range objectives has already been discussed. By developing such goals and objectives, the administrator has taken the first and most important step toward using time wisely. Once goals and objectives are set, action must, of necessity, follow if those targets are to be met. In other words, the administrator must take the initiative to reach his goals. By seizing the initiative, the administrator has a better opportunity to control his own time than if he waits for others to tell him what to do. Those who wait to be told what to do are persons who have lost control over the time available. And, by losing control over how time is to be used, one loses the opportunity to save time.

31. **Know where to get information**

One of the major functions of an administrator is to collect information in order to make decisions and complete projects. Some place in the world there is enough information to solve any problem or make any decision. The challenge is how to get the information when it is needed, because not knowing where or how to get information not only wastes time, but it can cause wrong decisions to be made.

Dictionaries, encyclopedias, libraries, and the yellow pages of the telephone directory are obvious and common

sources of information needed on a regular basis. But, the effective administrator must learn to use far more sources of information than these elementary ones. Information is located all around us, and the administrator who exercises tenacity and creativity will find it, while others fail. The author once needed a very selective mailing list, but was told by all experts that such a list did not exist. However, after a number of persistent telephone calls and letters, it was found that the needed addresses existed in a computer memory of a federal agency. Since the information was public, a request was made for the information and the valuable list was produced for a cost of slightly less than $1,000. The same list, even if it existed elsewhere, could not have been purchased for less than five times that amount. To repeat, the rule for getting hard information is to be persistent and creative.

32. Use experts

One way to obtain needed information in order to make decisions quickly or to accomplish tasks on time is to call upon the experts. There is an expert someplace on just about any topic. All one needs to do is search and the needed expert will be found. An administrator is seldom an expert in all of the fields he must administer; and, an effective administrator learns early in his career to rely

upon the experts in order to obtain needed information in order to make decisions.

33. Know how to close

Every conference, every appointment, and every telephone call must come to an end sooner or later, and preferably, sooner. But, many such encounters continue long after they should have ended, because some administrators don't know how to bring about closure. Here are some suggestions to help bring discussions to a close at the appropriate time:

a. At the beginning of the meeting, announce the time limit for the discussion.
b. When you have achieved all that is wanted from a discussion, summarize the meeting.
c. Don't introduce any topic unrelated to the subject under discussion.
d. Have an understanding with your secretary that she should enter your office if a meeting goes too long to remind you that you have other obligations to turn to.
e. Announce to your visitor that he has five minutes remaining to say what needs to be said.
f. Say, "Are there any final points which need to be made before we conclude this meeting?"

When two or more people engage in a business discussion, the objective should be to transact all needed business in the shortest time possible. The effective administrator will employ many tactics to achieve that objective.

34. Learn to speed read

How much of your day is spent reading? How many times are you given material to read, while being asked questions simultaneously? Research indicates that administrators spend an average of ten to twenty hours per week reviewing written materials. Wouldn't it be nice if their reading time could be reduced? Even a 10% reduction would release one to two hours per week. But chances are that any of the reputable commercial or academic reading acceleration courses would improve reading speed and comprehension by more than 10%. Such courses are relatively inexpensive and are available throughout the nation.

Two or three hours saved each week in reading may not sound like a significant savings of time, but this savings, coupled with the other suggestions in this book, should add up to a very significant amount of time.

35. Reverse Parkinson's Law

The British economist, C. Parkinson, propounded a number of satirical statements expressed as economic

laws. His most famous one is: "Work expands to fill the time alloted to it." There is a great deal of truth to this "law," expecially in bureaucracies where there is limited ability to hold bureaucrats personally responsible for production.

An effective way to save a significant amount of time is to reverse Parkinson's Law, by requiring that "work shrink to fill the time alloted to it." By placing a time limit on assignments, time is automatically saved, for without a deadline, tasks go on and on, wasting time. When a subordinate is given less time than he would like to complete a task, it is surprising how often the deadline is met, despite protestations from the employee. The use of deadlines to force the wise use of time has been discussed elsewhere in this book, but in the context of Parkinson's Law, it is being suggested here that deadlines are not enough. In addition to imposing deadlines, the amount of time alloted to tasks should be carefully limited. By doing this, time can be released to accomplish tasks which otherwise might go undone.

36. Avoid eye contact

Much has been written concerning the significance of eye contact, with most experts suggesting that eye contact is imperative in face to face discussions. Granted, eye contact plays an important role in effective communications when used properly; however, in the view

of the author, most experts overstress the importance and significance of eye contact. Constant eye contact can actually create unnecessary and unwanted tension in some situations.

As far as saving time is concerned, though, eye contact can be an important issue, since eye contact is often the first contact prior to a face to face discussion. Therefore, if discussion with another person is not wanted, then avoid eye contact. For administrators who do not have private offices, the chance of eye contact can be minimized by situating the desk in a manner so that the administrator faces away from passing pedestrian traffic. Not surprisingly, however, most persons with desks seem to place them in a manner that maximizes the chance of eye contact with passersby. Consequently, every casual passerby (especially the casual ones) and visitor become potential time wasters, because once eye contact is made, there is an implied invitation to open a discussion.

37. **Learn to write faster**

The author has three offices, one of which is in his home. All three of these offices contain a personal typewriter. Granted, not everyone can type and not every administrator needs to type; but, for some, the ability to use a typewriter well is a significant advantage in saving

time. For one thing, a skilled typist can type faster than the average person can hand write. Also, the typewritten page is more easily read, and that saves time for the reader as well. Additionally, some text does not lend itself readily to dictation, but rather, requires careful analysis as it is being written. A typewriter is ideal for this type of composition. Furthermore, a far as the author's life style is concerned, there are many times when a secretary is not immediately available when needed. Consequently, a personal typewriter readily available becomes very helpful, particularly for material which is not easily dictated into a tape recorder.

There are many occasions when an administrator must take notes rapidly. In such cases, shorthand is very helpful; however, few administrators have such a skill. But, there is a way that anyone can learn to increase the speed of his own handwriting, through the use of "speed writing." This procedure, advertised in many popular magazines, is a common sense method for shortening words, by replacing words with numbers, by deleting consonants, and by using standard abbreviations. According to this method, the sentence, "You, too, can easily see the President on Wednesday for a short period without an appointment," would appear as follows when speed writing is used: "U,2, cn ezly c th Pres on Wed 4 a shrt pd w/o an apntmt." At

first try, the method may appear awkward, but with practice it becomes quite natural -- and it does save time!

38. Reduce sleep

On the average, people sleep about 3,000 hours per year, or one-third of their lives. Some people do not need eight hours of sleep each night. For those people, any sleep in excess of eight hours should be considered a potential waste of time. Just think. If one could reduce the need for sleep by only one hour per night, he would find 365 hours per year; and, 365 hours is equivalent to ten work weeks or two and one-half months on the job!

Almost everybody can reduce their need for sleep to some extent without any deleterious health trade-off, if they are willing to follow these simple rules:

a. Keep constructively busy and interested in life.
b. Engage in enjoyable and light exercise regularly.
c. Eat natural food, and eat lightly.
d. Maintain a happy and peaceful state of mind.
e. Sleep in a good bed in a quiet, well-ventilated room.
f. Learn to "cat nap" at least once a day. Or, develop the ability to relax through meditation.

Try these simple rules and begin to reduce your sleep by a few minutes each night until you attain a reduction of

one hour. In some cases you may find that changing the hours of sleep may lessen the need for sleep. For example, some people find that by going to bed one hour earlier than customary, they can rise an hour and a half earlier the next morning, thus shortening the sleep period by thirty minutes.

39. Timing

There is a best time to undertake any task. Some tasks should be done immediately, while others should be put off. There is no simple rule, however, to make the distinction noted here. Each case must be analyzed on its own merits. In some cases, the decision on timing of task accomplishment is based on intuition; and, in other cases, timing may be dictated by overriding events. Regardless, however, every task should be approached with the question: "When is the best time to do this?" In some cases, protracted procrastination may be the best answer, because some problems simply go away without any action by the administrator. However, more often than not, the answer to when to do the job is "NOW!"

40. Monitor results - not activities

Every employee should have a specific job to perform and every employee should be evaluated primarily on how

well he performs that job. Unfortunately, in too many instances, especially in government bureaucracies where personal accountability is diffused, employees are evaluated on factors of questionable relevance to their jobs, such as personality traits. In too many instances, the evaluation of an employee is unfairly influenced by whether or not his supervisor likes him.

The failure to evaluate employees on the basis of an objective evaluation of their job performance breeds sycophantism and directs time and energy to activities not directly contributory to the mission of the agency. By evaluating the activities of employees, rather than the results of their activities, the administrator can waste time for himself, as well as misdirect employees into believing that results are not what count.

Not only should the administrator concentrate on the job results of subordinates, but the administrator should keep his eyes clearly focused on his own goals and disengage himself from activities which do not contribute to achieving those goals. By stressing results for himself and his subordinates, the administrator is able to save much time because extraneous activity is quickly eliminated in a task oriented work environment.

41. **The forty-first rule**

There is an important 41st rule, without which all the others are rendered moot. The administrator must exercise at least as much care in his choice of a secretary as in his choice of a mother for his children. In order for the foregoing rules to work, one must have a secretary who can walk on water, juggle eggs, and smooth boiling oil without singeing a hair. She must remain unruffled in a hurricane and retain her composure when all around her others are losing theirs and blaming it on her. She must be unfailingly sensitive to the feelings of others, but expect no support or even remote interest when her world threatens to crumble around her ears. She must be willing to lie convincingly for her boss without ever losing her integrity. She must be willing to work long hours at tasks her boss is incapable of doing for pay he would find laughable. She must never feel insulted when those who are her mental inferior refer to as "just a secretary." She must be mentor, confidante, conspirator, scapegoat, watchdog, ferret, workhorse, and bodyguard -- but never friend.

CHAPTER IV

THE ULTIMATE SECRET

This book has offered over sixty effective ways to "save" time. Most of the tactics discussed should be of immediate practicality to any administrator who wishes to save time, irrespective of his job. As we have learned from this book, time cannot be "saved." All we can do is learn to use effectively the little time available to us. Therefore, much of time "saving" is really based on how we wish to spend our time personally and professionally. For example, the decision to watch television at home some evening, rather than to exercise is a conscious or subconscious choice based upon some priority. The decision to eat lunch in the office, rather than to join the boys (or girls) at the local restaurant, is also a decision based upon some priority. even though the priority may not be of conscious awareness. In all cases where we make a choice as to how to spend time, we make a decision based upon some apparent or hidden priority. The decision as to how time will be spent is made on the basis of whether or not it contributes to what we want, what we are after. Which leads us to the first ultimate secret for "saving" time, which is:

DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT TO DO WITH YOUR LIFE PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY

You cannot make wise decisions as to how to use the fixed amount of time available to you unless you know where you are going personally and professionally. You cannot use time wisely unless you have goals in your personal life and goals for your professional life. The supreme time waster is the failure to have such goals for your life. Without such goals we may as well let others tell us what to do or flip a coin. Without goals, we go willy-nilly through life directed by any person who wishes to exploit us, or buffeted by any event which enters our lives.

So, the first super rule for saving time is: **Choose your life's goals.** However, the author would be less than honest to say that the selection of life goals is easy. Take a few minutes without reading further and contemplate just how you wish to spend the rest of your life. Try to identity just what it is that you are after in your life. Think seriously about this for a few minutes.

Here are some typical responses to the question, "What are your goals in life"?

Happiness
More Money

Security
A big house
A long life
Good health
A better job
A family

But frankly, these goals, by themselves, don't mean much. For example, what is "happiness"? Try to define what happiness means to you. When you have done that, try to determine how you go about achieving happiness. Why would one want "more money"? Money in itself is meaningless. It's only what money can do that counts. So, what do you want to use more money for? Will these things which you obtain with more money lead you toward your life goals? What is "security"? Although many people view security as a material thing, that is, a good job, retirement protection, etc., security for some is more a state of mind, having little to do with material things. Why does one want a "big house"? Is the big house really a symptom of a deeper need or a statement of pride? Is the big house really a goal in life, or is it merely one step toward a more important goal? What does "good health" mean? Is it the ability to run a mile in four minutes, or is it the absence of pain? Why does one want good health? To be free of discomfort or to have strength to accomplish

a more important goal? What is a "better job"? And, why would one want a better job? Isn't the desire for a better job really a statement that one wants a better job for some higher need? Some young people will state that marriage and a family is their goal. But marriage and a family are likely not ends in themselves. Besides, some marriages and families are a catastrophe, so that possibility should be considered when one thinks of marriage and family as goals.

The point being made here is that, although goal selection is the foundation for using time wisely, goal setting, if done properly, is a difficult and excruciating process, and it's not enough, simply to say that one's goal in life is to be "happy." Goals must be carefully defined and understood. But once goal setting has been conquered, there is a tremendous sense of purpose and peace given to one's life. Incidentally, goal-setting is not a one-time process. It is a process which one may consciously initiate at some specific point in life, but it is also a process which should continue throughout life. As the individual changes, and as events around the individual change, modifications must be made in one's lite goals; otherwise, one may find himself pursuing goals no longer of value.

Once goals have been selected, it's time to take the second ultimate step is using wisely what little time is left in your life. That second ultimate step is:

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR LIFE PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY

Noone can achieve his goals in life if he allows others to exploit him and allows events to control him. Once goals have been set, one must seize the initiative for controlling his life. This means that a plan must be laid out which leads to the fulfillment of the selected goals. Keep in mind that most administrators will have a tendency to divide their goals into two categories: personal goals and professional goals. This is not to suggest that the two categories are unrelated, however. As a matter of fact, the happy person is often one whose personal life and professional life work together to fulfill overall life goals. Most people who go through a serious goal-setting procedure will attempt to define their ultimate goals first, and then will attempt to make their professional goals consistent with their personal and more ultimate goals.

Let's hypothesize that a teacher has chosen among his goals to achieve excellence in his profession and a happy

secure family life. Let's further assume that this teacher (right or wrong) has decided that becoming a superintendent of a large school district would be his achievement of excellence in his profession. Given that goal, the teacher should begin to define what conditions lead to a superintendency. Once he has determined what conditions are most likely to lead to a superintendency, he should then set about to seek out those conditions or make those conditions happen.

For example, such a person should obtain certification in school administration, preferably with a doctor's degree. Furthermore, he should attempt to gain varied administrative experience. Often smaller school districts provide a greater opportunity for such experiences. When he feels he is ready for a superintendency, he should embark upon a carefully planned campaign to contact those school districts where vacancies exist. Naturally, there is no guarantee that this strategy will result in a superintendency. But one thing is certain, if the teacher does not at least try this strategy, he definitely will not become a superintendent.

The other goal of this mythical teacher was to have a happy and secure family life. It is likely in this hypothetical case that the teacher (right or wrong) has decided that a well-paying job as a superintendent would

contribute to the care and security of his family. Whether or not subsequent events would indicate that a superintendency helped him to achieve a happy and secure family is an issue answered only by the passage of time and events. The point is, nevertheless, that this person has chosen his goals and has set about to develop a strategy to achieve those goals.

Let's assume further that this teacher, in an effort to build a happy and secure family, has decided that every weekend at least part of one day would be spent together in some enjoyable activity which the entire family can engage in. This commitment, then, becomes part of a strategy plan which makes the family activity the number one priority for each weekend. As a result, the choice as to how to spend time over the weekend has been narrowed somewhat. Specifically, time is spent each weekend on an activity which contributes directly to the teacher's goal of happiness and security for his family.

In conclusion, then, the two super rules for saving time are:

1. **Decide what you want to do with your life,** and
2. **Take charge of your life.**